

## THE CHALLENGES AND FUTURE OF AFRICAN UNION - CHANGES IN PRIORITIES?

**Piotr BAJOR**

Poland, Krakow, Jagellonian University, Institute of Political Science and International Relations of Jagiellonian University in Krakow  
PhD, assistant professor, Acting Deputy Director for Educational Affairs of Institute

**Agata BAR**

Poland, Krakow, Jagellonian University, Institute of Political Science and International Relations of Jagiellonian University in Krakow  
Student

---

*The main topic of this article is the analysis of events of the 31st Summit of the African Union and an attempt to answer the question whether key decisions taken at this important event change the priorities of the African Union or they are just a continuation of the current organisation's policy.*

*The African continent is struggling with many problems in recent years. Frequent meetings of the rulers do not always cause significant changes and development of the continent. An attempt to analyze subsequent decisions of the African Union Assembly is to show whether the organisation is still pursuing objectives from a few years, such as, the flagship project Agenda 2063 or changing policy directions and trying other solutions to stabilise the continent and lead to sustainable development.*

*Commenting on any way the priorities of the African Union should be pointed out that they have not been infringed for many years. This stagnation in determining priorities may have both positive effect of persistence in the actions to improve the situation in Africa and negative in form of too long a faith in appropriate setting of priorities that may not be adequate to today's problems in Africa.*

*During the analysis of the decisions and actions taken at the 31st Summit of the African Union, it was possible to notice what issues the African Union puts the most emphasis. What is more, it can be stated whether the problems raised at the summit coincide with the main priorities of today's Africa which was defined much earlier.*

*In the course of the research carried out for this article, the importance of the events preceding the summit in African countries that were directly involved in the preparation of this important event.*

*The analysis of the 31st Summit of the African Union aims to holistically investigate the events in its course, with the greatest attention being paid to the*

*decisions taken by the assembly. Finally, the analysis of the priorities of the African Union and the main decisions taken at the summit is intended to answer on the main hypothesis or the 31st African Union's Summit changing the priorities on the continent or is a continuation of the current policy of the African Union.*

**Key words:** African Union, African Union Summit, Agenda 2063

Głównym tematem artykułu jest analiza wydarzeń z 31. Szczytu Unii Afrykańskiej, który odbył się w Mauretanii i próba odpowiedzi na pytanie, czy kluczowe decyzje podjęte w tym ważnym wydarzeniu zmieniają priorytety Unii Afrykańskiej, czy też stanowią jedynie kontynuację obecnej polityki.

W ostatnich latach kontynent afrykański boryka się z wieloma problemami. Częste spotkania przywódców nie zawsze powodują istotne zmiany i rozwój Afryki. Próba analizy kolejnych decyzji Zgromadzenia Unii Afrykańskiej ma na celu wykazanie, czy organizacja nadal realizuje cele ustanowione kilka lat wcześniej, takie jak flagowy projekt Agenda 2063 czy jednak nastąpiła zmiana kierunków polityki i próba innych rozwiązań w celu stabilizacji kontynentu i doprowadzenia do zrównoważonego rozwoju.

Komentując priorytety Unii Afrykańskiej warto zaznaczyć, że nie zostały one zmienione od paru lat. Stagnacja w określaniu priorytetów może mieć zarówno pozytywny wpływ stabilizacji w działaniach na rzecz poprawy sytuacji w Afryce, jak i negatywny w postaci zbyt dużej pewności odpowiedniego ustalenia priorytetów, które niekoniecznie są adekwatne do dzisiejszych problemów w Afryce.

Podczas analizowania decyzji i działań podjętych na 31. szczycie Unii Afrykańskiej można było zauważyć na jakie kwestie Unia Afrykańska kładzie szczególny nacisk. Co więcej, można stwierdzić, czy problemy poruszane na szczycie pokrywają się z głównymi priorytetami organizacji Unii Afrykańskiej, które zostały zdefiniowane znacznie wcześniej.

W trakcie badań przeprowadzonych na rzecz tego artykułu zaznaczono wagę incydentów, które miały miejsce na krótko przed samym szczytem, w krajach, bezpośrednio oddziałujących na organizację wydarzenia.

Analiza 31. Szczytu Unii Afrykańskiej ma na celu holistyczne zbadanie wydarzenia, ze szczególnym uwzględnieniem decyzji Zgromadzenia. Ponad to analiza priorytetów Unii Afrykańskiej i najważniejszych decyzji podjętych na szczycie ma na celu odpowiedź na główną hipotezę, czy 31. Szczyt Unii Afrykańskiej zmienił priorytety czy też jest kontynuacją obecnej polityki organizacji międzynarodowej.

**Słowa kluczowe:** Unia Afrykańska, szczyt Unii Afrykańskiej, Agenda 2062

### ***Introduction***

The 31st summit of the African Union took place in Nouakchott, the capital city of Mauritania, in northwestern Africa. It lasted two weeks, from June 25 to July 2, 2018. The summit took place for the first time in this country since it obtained independence in 1960. The UA summit is an important event taking place every half year in one of the member states of the African Union (UA), where representatives of member states and their governments have the opportunity to debate and express their positions and doubt related to the operations and plans of the organisation.

The summit in Nouakchott was presided over by the current chairman of the African Union - Paul Kagame, president of Rwanda. The main theme of the current summit was problem of corruption in African states and the title of the summit was "Winning the Fight against Corruption: A Sustainable Path to Africa's Transformation".

As a part of the media strategy adopted on the summit, readiness to fight against the radicalism and the terrorism was truly expressed. It has been marked that it destabilizes not only the individual countries, but also the entire continent and African Union as a international organization.

During the event several important steps were taken to improve the problems with corruption in Africa. They were not simplified to one of the policies of the African Union but to many of its aspects, which allowed for more holistic approach to the problems forces by the African continent these days.

### ***Background of the summit***

When attempting to analyse the course of the meeting of the 31st summit of the African Union, it seems to be interesting to look at the important events that directly preceded the summit. A dozen or so days before the start of the debate, in the neighbouring state of Mali, a terrorist attack on a military base took place, in which several to dozen people were killed [1]. What is more, after a few days, another attack took place in the north of Mali, where French patrols were attacked by putting bombs under the cars. Dozen of people were wounded [2]. It was very significant accident, because it was held just before the arrival of French President, Emmanuel Macron, as an observer representative to the African Union Summit. Both attacks show how unstable is the situation in West Africa but also across all continent. Despite the words of appreciation for the successful course of the summit from representatives of some of the strongest countries in the world, such as the United States or France, Mauritania has to put in a lot of effort both logistical and financial so that the summit would take place without major obstacles. However, it is important to underline the United States's respect which, after decisions adopted at the summit, wanted to cooperate as one of the UN's greatest forces in stabilizing the African continent, indi-

cation that the African Union as an organization must come out with the initiative [3].

### *Key decisions*

Presenting more important results of the 31st African Union Summit it is worth dividing them into decisions, resolution and declarations. There was announced only one resolution: „Resolution on the UNESCO- Equatorial Guinea International Prize for Research in Life Sciences”. Three declarations were announced during summary: „Declaration on the African Anti-Corruption Year”, „Declaration on the Situation in Palestine and the Middle East” and „Declaration on the Centenary of Nelson Mandela”. However, the most work was put into advertisement made at the African Union Summit decisions (twenty-three) [4].

While distinguishing the most important decisions, it is necessary to mention the decisions related to African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA), institutional reforms of the African Union, establishment of the African Union Development Agency (AUDA), trying to solve problems peace and security in the unstable regions of Africa, creating a new African Union budget, made the new appointments, support African candidatures for new Secretary General of the International Organisation of La Francophonie, theme of the 2018 and 2019 year in African Union [5]. Trying to approximate the subject of individual decisions.

The idea of create AfCFTA has already fallen in 2012 on The 18th Ordinary Session of the Assembly of Heads of State and Government of the African Union, where 2017 was tentatively adopted as the beginning of the area's activity [6]. At the 31st Union Summit, it was noted that forty-nine out of fifty-five African countries have already signed the agreement. What is more rest of the countries were also called in to enter to the area. Moreover presented new five services priority sectors for AfCFTA what is Transport, Communication, Finance, Tourism and Business services. As we can observe African Continental Free Trade Area is still not fully operational despite the fact that we have 2018. However, it is seems a big efforts by the representatives of the African Union to fully open AfCFTA in the near future.

The next important decisions were those related to the reform of the African Union institutions. Without a doubt, these are very important decisions regarding to the theme of this summit. Request have been made for reforms in a number of institutions including the Pan African Parliament, the Peace and Security Council or the African Court on Human and People's Rights. The main objective of the reforms is to review all anti-corruption mechanisms. What is more the Assembly decided to apply for the exact regulation of the division of

competences and work of African Union, the Regional Economic Communities Member States and the continental organisations to avoid inaccuracies.

Another important decision taken during the summit in Mauritania was establishing the African Union Development Agency (AUDA), which action plan and implementation stages should be presented at the beginning of 2019. AUDA will be a technical body of the African Union which is to replace the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD) with the launch of the action. Both NEPAD and future AUDA have to supporting and coordinating all activities related to the Agenda 2063 projects, which are key for the development of African continent [7].

Further important decisions are related to the questions of peace and security in unstable regions of Africa. This is a topic that appears on almost every meeting of members of the African Union and is not without a reason. Year by year the famous think tank „Found For Peace” indicates African states among the more instabilities countries. In the Fragile State Index for 2018 of the ten most unstable countries in the world, as many as seven are on African continent (South Sudan - 1st, Somalia - 2nd, Central African Republic - 5th, Congo Democratic Republic - 6th, Sudan - 7th, Chad - 8th and Zimbabwe - 10th) [8]. So that it is not surprising that the subject of security and peace has also appeared ash 31st African Union Summit.

Issues of Southern Sudan were raised, where it was noted that impeding the establishment of peace would be burdened with sanctions. What is more, the Assembly urged both governments of Sudan and South Sudan to implements all commitments included in the 2012 Cooperation agreement [9]. On the problem of Erythrei and Ethiopia, it was noted that African Union is supporting and appreciating the efforts to normalise relations between the two countries. The theme of Somalia was pleasantly mentioned in connection with the plan of Somalia's Tradition, which can be a good foundation for stabilization.

The Assembly raised also the topic of Libya and expressed great concern about growing instability of this country. In addition, the measures have been marked which should be taken immediately so that will be no further crises. Moreover to many disturbing speeches, positive aspects could be noted, such as the implementation of Zambia and Zimbabwe (as the first members of the African Union) of measures to silence wars by 2020, what is a part of big projects related to the Agenda 2063.

It was also passed on April 7 as the day of commemoration of the genocide against Tutsi in Rwanda from 1994. This type of commemoration is very important for society to remember but also to abide such humanitarian catastrophe.

Another important decision was approval of the 2019 budget in the amount of 681475337 USD, which means a reduction of the budget compared

to 2018 by 12 percent [10]. This is a huge step towards improving the African Union's funding, reducing cost on an annual basis enforces the implementation of reforms, among others tonight with corruption. This is a big step towards improving the economy of the African Union.

During the summit in Mauritania, new nominations were made in many institutions of the African Union : African Court of Human and People's Rights, African Commission on International Law, African Committee of Experts on the Rights and Welfare of the Child, Pan African University Council and African Union Board of External Auditors. What is more The Assembly mention about candidature of Louise Mushikiwabo (Rwanda) for a Secretary General of the International Organisation of La Francophonie. It is worth adding that in the election that took place this October Mrs. Mushikiwabo won [11].

Referring to this year's topic of the Summit ("Winning the Fight against Corruption: A Sustainable Path to Africa's Transformation"), the Assembly delivered a speech urging the member states to combat financial and economic fraud both from international and interior standard in individual states, communities and at the union level. What is more during the speech, the assembly declared that appropriate measures should be taken so that persons holding public positions would be required to declare the elimination of bank secrecy jurisdiction and tax havens [12].

The theme of 2019 was also presented during the recently ended 31th summit of African Union: „Year of Refugees, Returnees and Internally Displaced Persons in Africa: Towards Durable Solutions to Forced Displacement". This is a theme that very much suits to the contemporary problems of African citizens, which is a big step toward change, thanks to which the member states of African Union will find a solution for mineralization of the forced migrations on a continent.

### *Actions under existing plans*

After outlining the key decisions taken at 31st Summit of the African Union it is worth considering whether actions are hidden behind the words. Of course, it is very difficult to analyze after only a few months from the summit, however, it can be noticed that actions taken by the African Union are aimed are determined to meet the decisions taken. Support for the countries implementing Union's projects (such as Zambia or Zimbabwe), imposing sanctions on hindering the stabilization in the fragile countries or institutional changes for the fight against corruption it is a real action that follows the plans of the African Union. The successor of the OAU (Organization of African Unity), seeing the ineptitude of the previous organization, undoubtedly strives to develop the member countries. Looking at the projects of the African Union which are to work for the benefit of „Peaceful, Prosperous & Integrated Africa" [13]it is no-

ticeable that the projects very clearly show a perspective view on the continent. What is more the African Union operates on many levels and in many fields : peace and security, political affairs, HR, sciences and technology, infrastructure and energy, social affairs, trade and industry, rural economy and agriculture, economic affairs, legal affairs, women, gender and development and civil society and diaspora. All departments cooperate and act as a part of the policy of the African Union. All kinds of projects, analyzes, events and activities are an example of actions under existing plans.

### *Changes of priorities?*

Reaching the basic priorities of the African Union, the following can be distinguished: Institutional Capacity, Effective Communication, Resource Mobilization, Women's and Youth Empowerment, Africa's Human Capacity, Economic Integration, Food Security and Peace and Stability [14]. As part of these priorities, the organisation undertakes a number of activities and creates new projects for the African continent to develop. An example of this type of projects is Agenda 2063 with set goals and plans for the coming years. Taking into account the key decisions taken on the 31st African Union Summit and priorities of the Organisation, it can be seen that they coincide in a large part.

Undoubtedly, the most prominent priority that coincides with decisions is the issue of peace and security on the African continent, which was devoted to a large number of speeches during the meeting. In its actions, the African Union notes that without a stabilization on the continent there will be no possible development. The multitude of the conflicts in the region of Africa, which still exist, should be the most important priority of the organisation and indeed a number of activities are undertaken for peace and security. This year's summit confirms the importance of stabilization on the African continent.

Another important priority is the institutional potential of which the topic was also raised at the summit in Mauritania. A number of changes proposed during the event show that the African Union wants to develop its institutions and improve their operation. In reference to the theme of 2018, several key decisions were taken in the fight against corruption that affects Africa at many levels. According to data's carried out by think tank „Transparency International”, of the ten most corrupt states, four are African Countries (Somalia, South Sudan, Sudan, Guinea-Bissau). Moreover, the rest of the African countries also occupy one of the worst places on the list [15].

It is worth to notice that one of the goals of the African Union is effective communication, an example of which is the fact that summit took place and the heads of the Member States arrived to debate on the improvement of the situation on the continent. The African Union, as an organisation uniting all the countries of the continent, has the potential to influence positively the situation

of particular African states, but it would be possible it seems to be necessary that governments and rulers will have proper communication between each other.

What is more it can be even seen the accent related to the priority: Women's and Youth Empowerment. In a speech, the assembly talks about support for candidature of Louise Mushikiwabo for a Secretary General of the International Organisation of La Francophonie.

Unfortunately, deficiencies can be seen in the priorities of the African Union and more specifically in the projects implementing this policy. The most difficult will be to implement some of the plans related to Agenda 2063 such as silencing the guns by 2020 [16]. Despite the fact that the Agenda was established a few years ago, at this summit, it was noted that the first two countries took a real action to implement the project. This shows that it is unbelievable that within two years silence military operations and wars that Africa has been in for over a dozen years.

What is more, declarations and decisions must be followed by actions, which unfortunately could not be noticed in some of the statements. Expression of deep concern about the warfare that has been expressed about Libya should be covered by measures such as sanctions as in the case of other countries.

However it can not be said that there has been a change in priorities and policy after 31st African Union Summit. All the declarations and decisions undoubtedly strengthened the pillars of the organization's priorities and general policy, which has been going on for years. Political invariance and durability only gives a chance to stabilize the situation.

### ***Conclusion***

Answering the thesis if the key decisions of 31st African Union Summit changes priorities, it can be told after analysing key issues that no. The African Union has been created since it tries to not change its priorities too rapidly. Moreover all changes are gradual. Of course, this does not mean that African Union is stagnant, because all priorities are adapted to the current challenges with which the African continent has to measure up. Subject of the 2018 "Winning the Fight against Corruption: A Sustainable Path to Africa's Transformation" and the actions taken in the fight against corruption do not change the organisation's priorities. What is more, they have been inscribed in the African Union policy for many years. Comparing the 31st Summit of the African Union with the previous ones, no radical decisions were made. There was a lot of references to institutional changes and struggles for peace on the continent, but all of this is in line with the priorities of the African Union policy.

### ***Bibliography***



1. The war in the desert, [https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/resources/ids-sh/war\\_in\\_the\\_desert](https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/resources/ids-sh/war_in_the_desert), [29.11.2018].
2. Mali: Car bombing targeting French troops kills civilians, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2018/07/mali-car-bombing-targeting-french-troops-kills-civilians-180701150834395.html> [29.11.2018].
3. African Union Summit in Mauretania, <https://www.state.gov/r/pa/prs/ps/2018/07/283684.htm> [30.11.2018]
4. Decisions, Declarations and Resolution” [https://au.int/sites/default/files/decisions/34634-assembly\\_au\\_dec\\_690\\_-\\_712\\_xxxi\\_e.pdf](https://au.int/sites/default/files/decisions/34634-assembly_au_dec_690_-_712_xxxi_e.pdf) [28.11.2018].
5. Summary of the key decisions and declarations of the 31st African Union Summit, <https://au.int/en/pressreleases/20180706/summary-key-decisions-and-declarations-31st-african-union-summit> [28.11.2018].
6. CFTA-Continental Free Trade Area, <https://au.int/en/ti/cfta/about> [28.11.2019].
7. NEPAD/AU Development Agency, <https://dev.au.int/en/nepad> [28.11.2019].
8. Fragile State Index 2018, <http://fundforpeace.org/fsi/data/> [28.11.2018].
9. The Cooperation Agreement between The Republic of the Sudan and The Republic of South Sudan, <https://sites.tufts.edu/reinventingpeace/files/2012/09/The-Cooperation-Agreement-Between-Sudan-and-South-Sudan0001.pdf> [28.11.2018].
10. Financial reforms at the African Union lead to massive cuts of Union’s Budget <https://au.int/en/pressreleases/20180706/financial-reforms-african-union-lead-massive-cuts-union’s-budget> [28.11.2018].
11. La Secrétaire Générale, <https://www.francophonie.org/La-Secretaire-generale-251.html> [28.11.2018].
12. African Union to Launch 2018 as the African Anti-Corruption Year, <https://au.int/en/pressreleases/20180122/african-union-launch-2018-african-anti-corruption-year> [28.11.2019].
13. Towards a Peaceful, Prosperous & Integrated Africa, <https://au.int> [30.11.2018].
14. Priority, <https://au.int/en/priority> [29.11.2018].
15. Corruption perspectives index 2017, [https://www.transparency.org/news/feature/corruption\\_perceptions\\_index\\_2017#table](https://www.transparency.org/news/feature/corruption_perceptions_index_2017#table) [30.11.2019].
16. An overview of Agenda 2063, [https://au.int/sites/default/files/documents/33126-doc-11\\_an\\_overview\\_of\\_agenda.pdf](https://au.int/sites/default/files/documents/33126-doc-11_an_overview_of_agenda.pdf) [30.11.2018].